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ABSTRACT

This paper offers a critique of Evers' and Lakomski's 1991 book, "Knowing Educational Administration," and their discussion of neo-Marxist and critical theory. This paper argues that the science of educational administration is a historically contingent product of particular social forces and interests at a particular time. The kind of educational administration that was dominant during the 1960s and 70s separated educational from administrative concerns and privileged the latter. This paper describes how the Evers and Lakomski misinterpret Habermas and dismiss critical theory as subjectivist and examines problems with their choice of two major cultural theorists--Geertz and Sergiovanni. In conclusion, it offers an analysis of neo-Marxist organizational theory that has not been fundamental to the emergence of critical theories of educational administration. Second, their analysis of Habermas's early work is wrongly claimed as the basis of Bates's early work, as well as that of Giroux and Apple. Third, they fail to deal with Marxist/critical theories' political, social, and historical aspects. Philosophers who undertake analysis of educational administration should demonstrate care in the treatment of the arguments under examination, show proper reticence in representing social arguments, and avoid taking single instances as representative of the field under examination. (LMI)

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On Knowing: Cultural and Critical Approaches to Educational Administration.

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)"

Paper presented to the Regional Conference of the Commonwealth Council of Educational Administration. University of Hong Kong. August 1992

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Introduction.

Evers and Lakomski in their recent book Knowing Educational Administration (1991) have presented us with several philosophical analyses of various approaches to educational administration. Such analyses are to be welcomed as a contribution to the development of the field inasmuch as they both clarify and provide evaluations of particular positions. Such analyses should provide useful ground for the further development of more adequate accounts of administrative theory and action.

Such analyses do, however, need to be grounded in accurate representations of the arguments they purport to critique. In this respect Evers and Lakomski's presentation of at least some of the arguments they critique is rather less straightforward than it appears. For instance in reference to some of my early work (Bates 1980,1983) they assert that I claim that '... a science of administration is essentially manipulative and concerned with social control' (Evers & Lakomski 1991):12 emphasis added). In fact I said something quite different:

> ...as currently conceived by professional and professor alike, educational administration is a technology of control. Moreover, it is a technology of administrative control that systematically ignores both educational issues and those social and cultural issues that lie at the heart of people's commitment to, or alienation from, educational institutions.
> (Bates 1983:46)

Nothing here or in the associated argument asserts that a science of administration is essentially or necessarily a manipulative form of social control. My point is a simple and different one, one concerned with the social construction and purposes of the particular conception of educational administration which dominated the field during the sixties and seventies- a conception which separated educational from administrative concerns and privileged the latter. Indeed, the point I was making was not concerned with the epistemological foundations of science or administration per se. It was rather, an observation based upon the historical association of three social movements which were partly responsible for this state of affairs:

> This separation of administrative from educational concerns was shown to have its roots in three social movements: the

> municipal reform movement, occupational professionalism, and the cult of efficiency.
>
> (Bates 1983:47)

My conclusion was certainly that

> The result has been the establishment in education of hierarchical structures of authority and control that both mirror and reproduce the systematic inequalities of the wider society.
>
> (Bates 1983:47)

My point, however, was not that this result was a necessary and inevitable concomitant of 'a science of administration', but that it was an historically contingent product of particular social forces and interests at a particular time. Educational administration could possibly have developed differently, could possibly have represented different interests and could possibly have been built on an alternative conception of science to that to which it had in fact appealed.

It is true that I made passing reference to inadequacies in the model of science to which traditional theorists in educational administration constantly appealed but not on the basis of a 'robust and systematic indictment of poor philosophy' that Evers and Lakomski claim (Evers & Lakomski 1991):13). My grounds for complaint were quite different and rested on observations drawn briefly from the sociology and anthropology of science - particularly those traditions concerned with processes of the production of science and scientific knowledge.

A further difficulty is that Evers and Lakomski represent the argument of articles they quote as being based upon a particular reading of Habermas:

> In developing this claim (that a science of administration is essentially manipulative and concerned with social control) Bates draws upon a reading of the early work of Habermas for an understanding of science: particularly the epistemological thesis of Knowledge and Human Interests and the 'General Perspective' lecture published as the appendix to the English translation (Habermas 1972), pp301-387).
>
> (Evers & Lakomski 1991:12)

In fact my 1980 article makes no reference to Habermas (I don't believe I had even read Knowledge and Human Interests at that date) though Evers and Lakomski provide an extensive quotation that suggests that not only had I read the volume in question but that my whole argument was based upon it!

Similarly, my 1983 paper makes a single brief reference to Habermas in the context of introducing Watkins (1983) discussion of the distorted structures of communication that arise from the inappropriate exercise of power in hierarchical organisations. But Evers and Lakomski get the reference wrong: it was in fact to Habermas's 1976 publication of Legitimation Crisis and not the 1972 Knowledge and Human Interests as they suggest.

Again, they represent my paper as being fundamentally concerned with an exposition of Habermas's thesis as the basis for a philosophical attack on the traditions of educational administration. In fact, both papers are conceived within the tradition of the New Sociology of Education. Concerns with philosophical issues arise en passant and are neither grounded in, nor articulated in the terms suggested by Evers and Lakomski.

However, even had I couched my argument in terms of the Habermasian thesis I could not possibly have agreed with their absurd conclusion which supposedly finishes off critical theory as a serious contribution to the debate. However, as my work is taken as the starting point for their supposed exegesis I feel bound to address it.

Evers and Lakomski claim that

> There are a number of things that are puzzling about (Habermas's) account of science and administration, especially in view of the fact that Bates thinks traditional empiricist accounts of the practice and conduct of science are mistaken, For if the traditional view of science is wrong, and we know that it is thanks to the work of Quine, Kuhn, Feyerabend, Hesse and others, then the story Habermas tells of empirical science being constituted by technical interests of control and manipulation is also wrong.
>
> (Evers & Lakomski 1991:13)

This is, of course, not necessarily so. For such a claim to be sustained it would need to be shown that the grounds on which the traditional (essentially positivist) view of science was

successfully challenged by Quine et al were precisely those on which Habermas had based his claims. In fact the grounds on which the challenge was mounted by Quine et al were essentially epistemological (grounds which are further explicated by Evers and Lakomski in their assessment of the Theory Movement in educational administration and with which Habermas largely agrees). But the grounds on which Habermas makes his claim concerning the role of science in modern societies were sociological. That is, Habermas claims that

> From the very beginning the pattern of human sociocultural development has been determined by a growing power of technical control over the external conditions of existence....We know how to bring about the relevant conditions of life under control, that is, we know how to adapt the environment to our needs culturally rather than adapting ourselves to external nature.
>
> (Habermas 1989:260)

This knowledge has resulted from a modern conception of science and an alteration in its purpose:

> In this connection modern science assumes a singular function. In distinction from the philosophical sciences of the older sort, the empirical sciences have developed since Galileo's time within a methodological frame of reference that reflects the transcendental viewpoint of possible technical control. Hence the modern sciences produce knowledge which through its *form* (and not through the subjective intentions of scientists) is technically exploitable knowledge, although the possible applications generally are realized afterwards.
>
> (Habermas 1989:249)

Or an even more pointedly social claim:

> ...the cognitive function of modern sciences must be understood in connection with the system of social labor: they extend and rationalize our power of technical control over objective or (what amounts to the same thing) objectified processes of nature and society.
>
> (Habermas 1989:36)

On the basis of a confusion of their epistemological concerns with the social concerns expressed by Habermas Evers and Lakomski suggest that Habermas would therefore claim that

> If traditional views of science were true then technical control and manipulation would occur. Therefore if everyone (professor and practitioner alike) acted as though they were true then technical control and manipulation would occur.
> (Evers & Lakomski 1991:14)

Habermas, of course makes no such claim. This is a mischievous invention of Evers and Lakomski, as is their attribution of an extreme subjectivist view to Habermas:

> The missing premise in this (Habermas's) argument is a subjectivist claim that the effect of my having a particular theory of the world somehow makes the world that way, or brings it into line with my theory.
> (Evers & Lakomski 1991:14)

But Habermas explicitly rejects a purely subjectivist theory of meaning. His theory of communicative action

> ... relies on a cooperative process of interpretation in which participants relate simultaneously to something in the objective, the social and the subjective worlds even when they thematically stress only one of the three components in their utterances.
> (Habermas 1987:120)

To dismiss critical theory as subjectivist clearly involves a careless reading of Habermas. To suggest, as Evers and Lakomski do, that critical theorists would agree that water flows uphill if that was the 'dominant orthodoxy' is simply mischievous.

I shall return later to Evers and Lakomski's failure to treat the social claims of critical theory seriously and with due care. Suffice it to note here that there is a major problem inherent in their insistence that social arguments be treated solely as epistemological arguments. Their exclusion of the social is a fundamental flaw in their approach to Knowing Educational Administration. This flaw is particularly evident in their treatment of The Cultural Perspective (Chapter 6) and Administration for Emancipation (Chapter 7) to which I now turn.

The Cultural Perspective.

Evers and Lakomski choose two major representatives of the cultural perspective: Geertz, from the field of anthropology and Sergiovanni as the champion of such a perspective in educational administration.

Choosing Geertz as the sole representative of the complex and contested terrain of anthropological debate over the concept of culture runs the danger of presenting a very partial view of the field. For their purposes, however, Evers and Lakomski have chosen well for Geertz does indeed argue that cultures are only to be understood in their own terms - that they are essentially incommensurable as systems of thought. Moreover, in his 1983 address to the American Anthropological Association Geertz mounted a strong attack on the notion of a universal social science and against the universalising of common sense, arguing that social practice and common sense itself were only amenable to study in their particularity (Geertz 1984). Indeed, as Austin Broos argues:

> Geertz suggests we should commit ourselves to an 'ethnography of thought' recognising that different cultures like different academic disciplines constitute different 'forms of life' (after Wittgenstein) or different ways of being in the world (after Heidegger).
>
> (Austin-Broos 1987:155)

But Geertz's point of view is highly controversial among anthropologists, notwithstanding the fame of his analysis of the Balinese Cockfight. The relativism of his position is by no means a universally agreed position among anthropologists. Indeed, the foundations of his relativist 'ethnography of thought' are strongly challenged by others in his field. In commenting on his most famous ethnographies of Modjokuto and Balinese societies Austin Broos comments

> There are real differences between (these) societies and it appears that in some the aesthetic component is more pronounced, or more pronounced in some areas of life. Yet Geertz has not stopped here. He has taken up this discontinuity between cultures and made it a uniform and total breach between each culture and any others we currently identify. For all the boldness of this move, it has been carried forward on the basis only of some very vague

> ruminations on common sense, rationality, and the nature of semantics and cognitive symbols that do not withstand rigourous investigation.
>
> (Austin-Broos 1987:157)

Choosing Geertz as the champion of the contemporary debate over culture as a concept is, therefore, a very partial representation of a debate in which many players have opposed and denied the relativism of his position. 'Turtles all the way down' is not a proper characterisation of current anthropological thought in the area of culture. Such a characterisation reduces a complex and sophisticated argument to the level of parody - which, of course, is easier to dismiss, as Evers and Lakomski do.

Part of this parody relies again upon the exclusion of qualifying arguments. In their discussion of the cultural perspective the cultural is equated with individual subjectivity. That is, the hermeneutic attempt to understand as well as simply describe human interaction is reduced to a discussion of subjectivity:

> This, means, then, that the validity of understanding an act or event is a matter of subjective assessment of an individual, or a group, given prevailing attitudes in that culture or time.
>
> (Evers & Lakomski 1991:127)

Or, again:

> What makes us 'human' in the cultural perspective, is that we possess 'inner' phenomena such as motives, purposes, and intentions.
>
> (Evers & Lakomski 1991:128)

What such an interpretation of cultural anthropology suggests is that culture is reducible to internal psychological states which originate somewhere inside the individual in much the same way as hunger and thirst. This is a complete denial of the vigorous assertion by anthropologists such as Bourdieu that culture is a result - not of our appetites or desires- but of our socialness (as indeed may hunger and thirst be social in their origins though that is another argument). Indeed:

> Bourdieu is concerned with our socialness, but with a socialness conferred by the complex of dispositions which we as social strategists, employ in our everyday life....For

> Bourdieu, to concentrate on individuals and actual populations is to fail to transcend the ideology of individualism which dominates our society; it is to fetishise our personalities at the expense of our sociological knowledge, to succumb to subjectivism.
>
> (Miller 1987:215)

Evers and Lakomski fail to take this socially oriented interpretation of culture into account. Preferring, instead a version which is indeed prone to accusations of relativism, subjectivism and reductionism. Once again, their exclusion of the social has led them to trivialise an important argument, dismissing it on grounds that do not engage some of its most important characteristics which do indeed address their complaints (see for, instance, (Bates 1987).

Their treatment of Sergiovanni is hardly more serious. While they, quite accurately, represent Sergiovanni as emphasizing that

> ...the cultural perspective in educational administration is concerned more with understanding than explaining, with sense-making rather than description, and with 'community' and shared meanings and values
>
> (Evers & Lakomski 1991: 125)

they also go on to eliminate the social from Sergiovanni's argument, suggesting that what he is doing is a form of reductionism which posits inner states which are unobservable and can not therefore contribute to our understanding of the processes of understanding.

Their response to this problem however is a further reduction: one which reduces psychological phenomena to physical ones.

> In our view, interpretation requires us to draw on all theory that is relevant to human action. Since this manifestly includes powerful scientific physicalist theories of human behaviour, a coherentist view of evidence for interpretation, for assigning motives, beliefs, desires, and intentions, will place a premium on reducing the mental to the physical, at least at the level of substance.
>
> (Evers & Lakomski 1991:133)

Or even more explicitly

> ...while we do not deny the existence of inner phenomena as causing human behaviour, it is not intentions which do the causal work but fine grained, neuro-physiological mechanisms. Intentions, as referred to in ordinary talk, are more fruitfully conceived of as 'promissory notes' for these underlying mechanisms which, unlike the former, are, and will be, identifiable by our best science.
>
> (Evers & Lakomski 1991:134)

Once again, there is a total denial of the social: a reduction of the social to the psychological, the psychological to the biological and the biological to the physical. Yet we are given no reasons why such an extraordinary assertion should be accepted. We are given no examples or illustrations of the power or utility of such an argument. We are simply told that 'a better ontological candidate for 'inner' states would be the fine-grained physical properties of human subject' (p132). Turtles all the way down indeed.

Administration for Emancipation

Evers and Lakomski's discussion of neo-Marxist and Critical theory in relatio to educational administration is curious, to say the least. The claim of their book is that it examines post-postivist theories of educational administration in the light of their philosophical claims. In their first chapter they acknowledge the critique of traditional educational administration theory made by critical theorists as a major post-positivist challenge. They recognise that 'critical theory approaches to administration are complex and multi-faceted, covering ethical, political, social, linguistic, and personal dimensions' and promise a 'systematic treatment' of these issues in Chapter Seven. What is delivered in Chapter Seven is, however, an analysis which eliminates any consideration of the ethical, political and social; which makes only brief reference to Foster's development of critical theory in educational administration and which completely ignores any textual analysis of my work which they claim in chapter one to be central to the critical theory tradition in educational administration.

Instead, we are presented firstly with an analysis of neo-Marxist organisational theory which has in fact not been fundamental to

the emergence of critical theories of educational administration and an analysis of Habermas's early work which is also wrongly claimed as the basis of my own early work (which in fact grew out of the New Sociology of Education) as well as that of Giroux (whose work in fact appealed to earlier critical theorists of the Frankfurt school and who is quite critical of Habermas - (see Giroux 1992) and Apple, who has, in fact, paid little attention to Habermas's work and who is mainly interested in curriculum).

Rather than deliver its earlier promise, Chapter Seven avoids the quite extensive work in the Marxist/Critical theory tradition in educational administration (see for instance Bates:1985). Despite this, it also claims to have dispensed with such work on educational administration on the basis of an analysis of Habermas's work of the earlier period. This, however, is not dealt with in its political, social and historical aspects, but only in its epistemological aspects - ones which it is acknowledged that Habermas has turned aside from.

Yet it is these aspects that provide the foundation of a critical theory of educational administration. This theory has derived almost wholly from Habermas's concern with the political economy of late capitalist societies - especially those issues articulated in Legitimation Crisis (Habermas 1975) and more recently reformulated in the Theory of Communicative Action Vol 2 (1987).

These concern the encroachment of administrative rationality via systems theory and the mechanisms of power and money on the 'life-world' within which communicative rationality arises and through which society is symbolically reproduced. The encroachment of the 'system' on the 'lifeworld' produces a series of crises which can only be resolved through communicative rationality which is itself only possible within the context of the lifeworld. The 'communicative rationality' of Habermas's later work is a substantial revision of his earlier work to which Evers and Lakomski refer. It is certainly not the case that Habermas's notion of communicative rationality is simply a 'consensus theory of truth (which) rules out the possibility of statements being true by virtue of empirical reality' as Evers and Lakomski suggest (1991:161). Indeed, Habermas is at pains to emphasise that communicative rationality addresses objective, subjective and inter-subjective domains of reference simultaneously. Empirical referents are therefore at least implicit in all instances of communicative rationality.

In choosing 'to examine the original version of Habermas's critical theory, rather than the reading given to it by writers in educational administration or organizational analysis' (p163) Evers and Lakomski therefore avoid discussing the social and political roots of critical educational administration theorists interest in Habermas, and Habermas's reformulation of his earlier interest in the philosophy of consciousness which he recognizes as imposing significant limitations on his original formulation.

Evers and Lakomski can, therefore, neither claim to have dealt fairly with the work of critical theorists of educational administration, nor with Habermas's reformulation of critical theory.

Conclusion.

It has not been the purpose of this paper to fully articulate either a cultural perspective or a critical theory of educational administration. The beginnings of each of these projects I have suggested elsewhere (Bates, 1984; 1985; 1987; 1988). Nor has it been to deny the worth of philosophical analyses of theories of educational administration. Indeed, I welcome the attention of philosophers in the field. But the minimal conditions they should observe are care in the treatment of the arguments they examine; a proper reticence in re-presenting social arguments as directed towards solving philosophical problems and avoidance of taking single instances as representative of the field under examination.

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